

Elizabeth Gilbert Biography

Source: litlovers.com



Elizabeth Gilbert is the author of a story collection, *Pilgrims* (a finalist for the PEN/Hemingway Award); a novel, *Stern Men*; and *The Last American Man* (a finalist for the National Book Award and the National Book Critics Circle Award). While Elizabeth Gilbert's roots are in journalism—she's a Pushcart Prize-winning and National Magazine Award-nominated writer—it's her books that have granted her even more attention, including a 2002 National Book Award nomination.

Gilbert departed from reporting in 1997, with the publication of her first collection of short fiction, *Pilgrims*. A finalist for the 1998 PEN/Hemingway Award, *Pilgrims* was also selected as a New York Times Notable Book and listed as one of the “Most Intriguing Books of 1997” by *Glamour* magazine. “The author embraces the bizarre and fabulous with similar enthusiasm,” observed Liam Callanan in the New York Times Book Review. *Pilgrims* went on to win best first fiction awards from the Paris Review, the Southern Review, and Ploughshares.

Gilbert's first full-length novel, *Stern Men*, followed in 2000. A rollicking cruise on the high seas—and high drama—of the fishing industry, the novel sailed onto the scene to rave reviews: “A wonderful first novel about life, love and lobster fishing.... high entertainment” (*USA Today*); “Funny, clever and wise” (*Seattle Times*); “Howlingly funny” (*San Francisco Chronicle*). Gilbert's fiction has also been published in several magazines and literary reviews, including *Esquire*, *STORY*, *GQ*, *Paris Review*, *Ploughshares*, and the *Mississippi Review*.

For her 2002 book, however, *The Last American Man*, Gilbert returned to her journalistic roots. In it she tells the true story of Eustace Conway, a man who deserted modern society to make his way in the wilderness of the Appalachian Mountains. Nominated for a 2002 National Book Award for Nonfiction, the book was called “a complicated portrait of American maleness that is as original as it is surprising” (*Publishers Weekly*) and “a first-rate work of reportage” (*Kirkus Reviews*).

For her spiritual memoir, *Eat, Pray, Love: One Woman's Search for Everything Across Italy, India, and Indonesia*, Gilbert turned to introspection—without missing the chance to tell yet another adventurous tale. After a messy divorce, she decided to confront her depression and loneliness by traveling to three countries that she felt had something she was seeking. First, in Italy, she seeks to master the art of pleasure by indulging her senses. Then, in an Indian ashram, she learns about the powerful practice of meditation. Finally, she heads to Bali, where she at last achieves a blissful balance. “Gilbert's original voice and unforced wit lend an unpretentious air to her expansive spiritual journey” (*Barnes & Noble editors*).

Book Summary

Source: litlovers.com

This beautifully written, heartfelt memoir touched a nerve among both readers and reviewers. Elizabeth Gilbert tells how she made the difficult choice to leave behind all the trappings of modern American success (marriage, house in the country, career) and find, instead, what she truly wanted from life.

Setting out for a year to study three different aspects of her nature amid three different cultures, Gilbert explored the art of pleasure in Italy and the art of devotion in India, and then a balance between the two on the Indonesian island of Bali.

By turns rapturous and rueful, this wise and funny author (whom Booklist calls “Anne Lamott's hip, yoga-practicing, footloose younger sister”) is poised to garner yet more adoring fans. (From the publisher.)

Discussion Questions

Source: books.wwnorton.com

1. Gilbert writes that “the appreciation of pleasure can be the anchor of humanity,” making the argument that America is “an entertainment-seeking nation, not necessarily a pleasure-seeking one.” Is this a fair assessment?
2. After imagining a petition to God for divorce, an exhausted Gilbert answers her phone to news that her husband has finally signed. During a moment of quietude before a Roman fountain, she opens her Louise Glück collection to a verse about a fountain, one reminiscent of the Balinese medicine man's drawing. After struggling to master a 182-verse daily prayer, she succeeds by focusing on her

nephew, who suddenly is free from nightmares. Do these incidents of fortuitous timing signal fate? Cosmic unity? Coincidence?

3. Gilbert hashes out internal debates in a notebook, a place where she can argue with her inner demons and remind herself about the constancy of self-love. When an inner monologue becomes a literal conversation between a divided self, is this a sign of last resort or of self-reliance?

4. When Gilbert finally returns to Bali and seeks out the medicine man who foretold her return to study with him, he doesn't recognize her. Despite her despair, she persists in her attempts to spark his memory, eventually succeeding. How much of the success of Gilbert's journey do you attribute to persistence?

5. Prayer and meditation are both things that can be learned and, importantly, improved. In India, Gilbert learns a stoic, ascetic meditation technique. In Bali, she learns an approach based on smiling. Do you think the two can be synergistic? Or is Ketut Liyer right when he describes them as "same-same"?

6. Gender roles come up repeatedly in *Eat, Pray, Love*, be it macho Italian men eating cream puffs after a home team's soccer loss, or a young Indian's disdain for the marriage she will be expected to embark upon at age eighteen, or the Balinese healer's sly approach to male impotence in a society where women are assumed responsible for their childlessness. How relevant is Gilbert's gender?

7. In what ways is spiritual success similar to other forms of success? How is it different? Can they be so fundamentally different that they're not comparable?

8. Do you think people are more open to new experiences when they travel? And why?

9. Abstinence in Italy seems extreme, but necessary, for a woman who has repeatedly moved from one man's arms to another's. After all, it's only after Gilbert has found herself that she can share herself fully in love. What does this say about her earlier relationships?

10. Gilbert mentions her ease at making friends, regardless of where she is. At one point at the ashram, she realizes that she is too sociable and decides to embark on a period of silence, to become the Quiet Girl in the Back of the Temple. It is just after making this decision that she is assigned the role of ashram key hostess. What does this say about honing one's nature rather than trying to escape it? Do you think perceived faults can be transformed into strengths rather than merely repressed?



Book Club in a Bag

Eat, Pray, Love
by Elizabeth Gilbert



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Eat, Pray, Love

Contents and Sign-out Sheet

Kits include one bag, 10 books, and a pocket folder of materials.
Use this sign-out sheet to keep track of who takes which copy of the book. Groups may keep the folder when returning the books and bag.

Copy	Name	Returned
1	_____	<input type="checkbox"/>
2	_____	<input type="checkbox"/>
3	_____	<input type="checkbox"/>
4	_____	<input type="checkbox"/>
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9	_____	<input type="checkbox"/>
10	_____	<input type="checkbox"/>

Due Date:



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